

A photograph of the Cleveland skyline featuring several prominent skyscrapers, including the Terminal Tower and the Key Tower, situated along the banks of a river. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds. The foreground shows a body of water with a small boat and some industrial structures along the shore.

CULTURE OF RADICAL ENGAGEMENT

PARTICIPANT GUIDE CLEVELAND

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This participant guide includes adaptations of the works of Marshall Ganz of Harvard University (<http://www.hks.harvard.edu/about/faculty-staff-directory/marshall-ganz>) and New Organizing Institute (<http://www.neworganizing.com>).

It integrates materials originally authored and adapted by a collaborative team at The Relational Center (<http://www.relationalcenter.org/>), including Mark Fairfield, Paul Engler, Cedar Landsman, and Lucien Demaris—working together on initiatives incubated through The Relational Center and further developed by Relational Uprising (<http://www.relationaluprising.org/>). Many other thought leaders have contributed ideas that shaped the outcome of these materials.

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THE CRISIS IS OVERWHELMING

The Great Unraveling

“As the rug is progressively pulled out from under us, it is easy to panic, and even easier to simply shut down.”

— Joanna Macy

IT'S THE RESULT OF CULTURE

The Commodification of Social Bonds

“When the culture itself is absorbed into the economy, only *commercial* bonds will be left to hold society together.”

— Jeremy Rifkin

CULTURE IS MADE OF STORIES

The Stories that Organize Us

“The cultural lens reflects both the individual learning of personal experience and the shared learning of the tribe, as communicated through its framing cultural stories.”

— David Korten

PROLOGUE

We live in an incredibly challenging time. Not only is our planet's ecology at risk of collapse. Our humanity is also at risk, evident in all the ways that dominant systems have divided and wounded us, creating generations of prejudice, trauma, and separation.

This dominant culture has spread dehumanizing Stories of Separation which alienate us from our bodies, from the earth, and from our fellow human beings. But we can tell a different story about who we are and where we are going.

The Culture of Radical Engagement helps us reclaim connection as a vital resource. It helps us understand how we can intentionally cultivate humanizing experiences in our communities, and how we can relate in a way that restores justice, connection, and support to our relations. To do so, we must hold a relational culture together, with humanizing values and a new story.

Stories of Connection help us create the conditions for a world where we can heal, relate differently, and work together to create living alternatives that support us to thrive in community.



THE CRISIS OF SEPARATION

We face a critical convergence of multiple struggles—social, economic, political and environmental.

WE CAN SEE IT ON THE HORIZON



SOCIAL

- mental illness
- social isolation
- bullying, violence
- child suicide
- sexism/gender inequality
- homophobia/transphobia
- unequal access to education
- racism against POC
- mass incarceration

ECONOMIC

- financial insecurity
- poverty/wage inequality
- exploitation of workers
- concentration of wealth
- greed/hoarding of resources
- trade abuses
- corporate control of markets

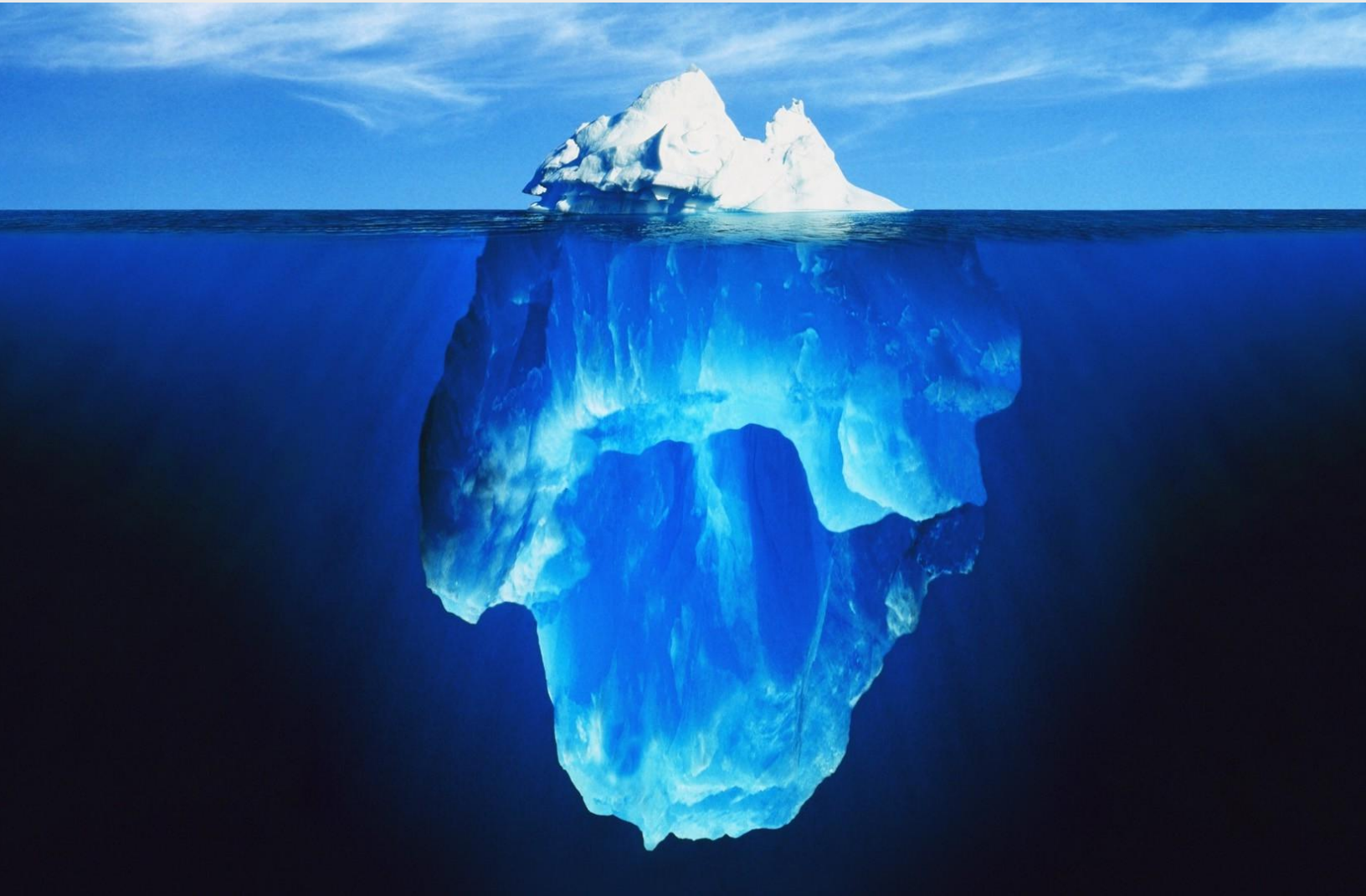
POLITICAL

- corruption
- divisiveness
- escalating conflict
- denial of civil rights
- voter disenfranchisement
- dehumanizing narratives
- exclusion of marginalized voices

ENVIRONMENTAL

- pollution
- drought
- soil erosion
- desertification
- biodiversity loss
- climate change
- fossil fuel exploitation
- ocean acidification
- species extinction
- deforestation
- malnutrition

BUT IT'S JUST THE TIP OF THE **ICEBERG**



WHILE THE CRISIS THAT LOOMS IS PLAINLY IN VIEW, THE DEHUMANIZING CULTURE THAT *UNDERLIES* IT IS HARDER TO SEE.

STORIES OF SEPARATION



Three stories have been woven into our social fabric, weakening the threads that tie us to one another and ultimately eroding our social institutions.

Domination

*Alienation from
Nature & Body*

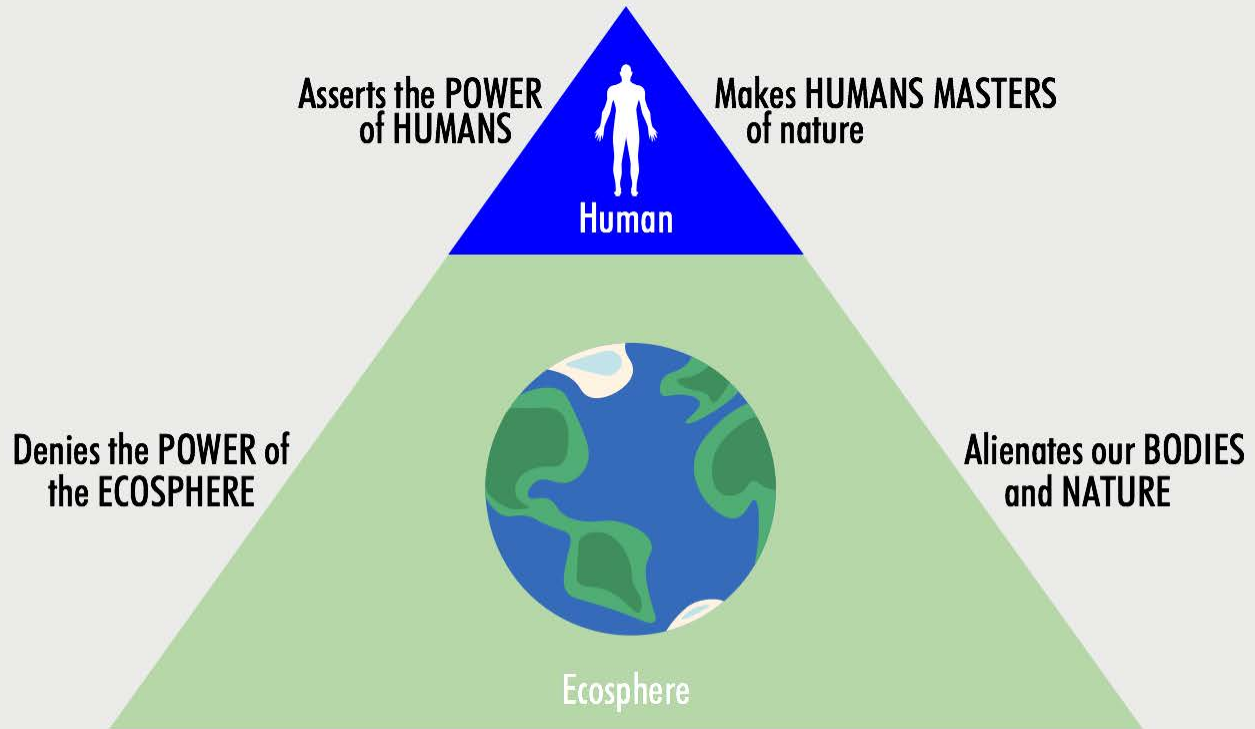
Civilization

*Alienation from
Diverse Voices*

Self-Sufficiency

*Alienation from
One Another*

THE STORY OF DOMINATION



The story goes like this:

- Humans are superior & have outsmarted/transcended nature.
- We have a right to seize control of it for profit.
- Our bodies remind us of nature; so we feel ashamed of them & seek to subdue their wild, primitive impulses.
- Nature & the body are commodities that can be harnessed, leveraged & traded.

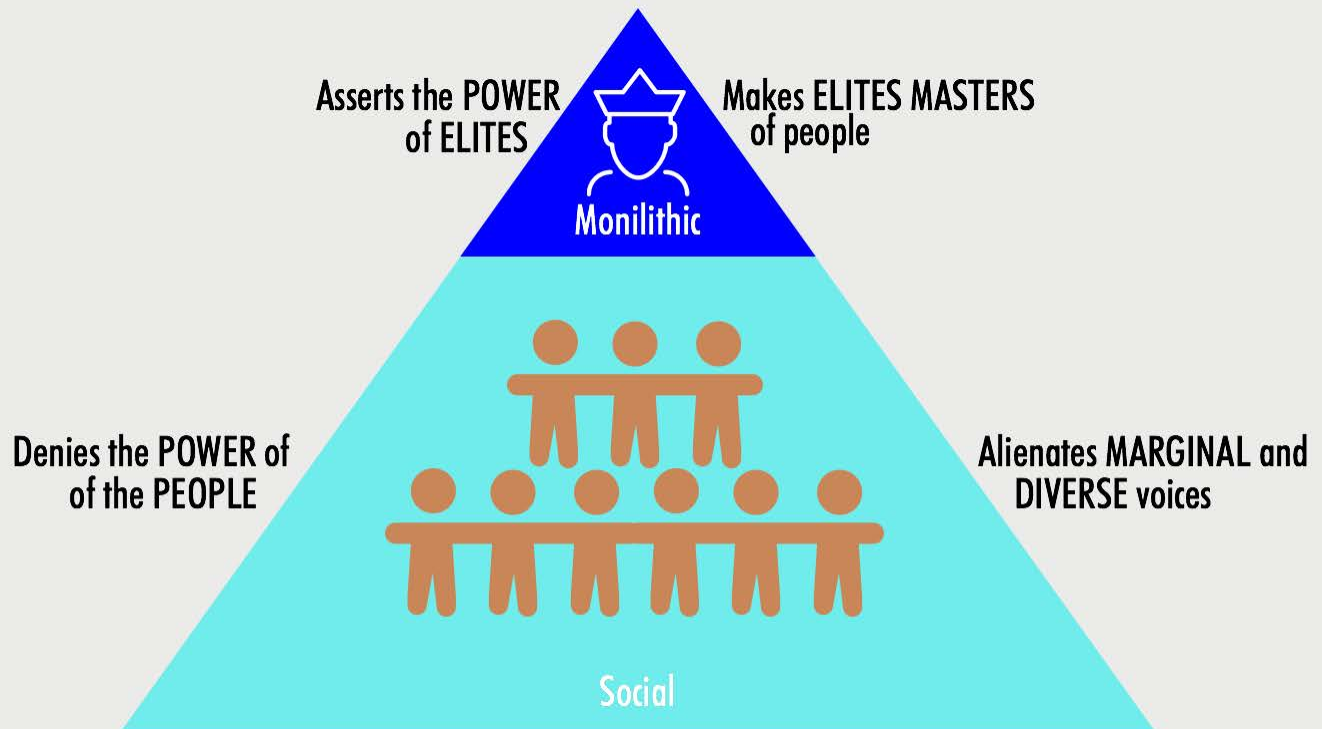
Crazy things we say:

- "This is *my* property."
- "Get off my land!"
- "I was here first!"
- "Get a room!"
- "No pain...no gain."
- "Beauty hurts."
- "Bite the bullet."
- "Suck it up."
- "Mind over matter."

What's wrong with this?

- It fundamentally misunderstands nature & the conditions for life.
- It makes us want to extract the earth's resources to the point of destruction.
- It makes us forget that whatever happens to nature also happens to us.
- It makes us see health as a personal endeavor, rather than a holistic one.
- It has left us with violated, desensitized, immobilized bodies.
- It pulls us toward unattainable ideas of wellness, fitness & beauty.
- It deprives us of vitality, mobility & sensitivity.

THE STORY OF CIVILIZATION



The story goes like this:

- We are a civilized, advanced people.
- Our dignity stems from our use of reason which conquers emotionality.
- We are better off now that we have left the past behind us, liberated from those savage practices & naive ideas.
- Any casualties are the unavoidable collateral damage of progress.

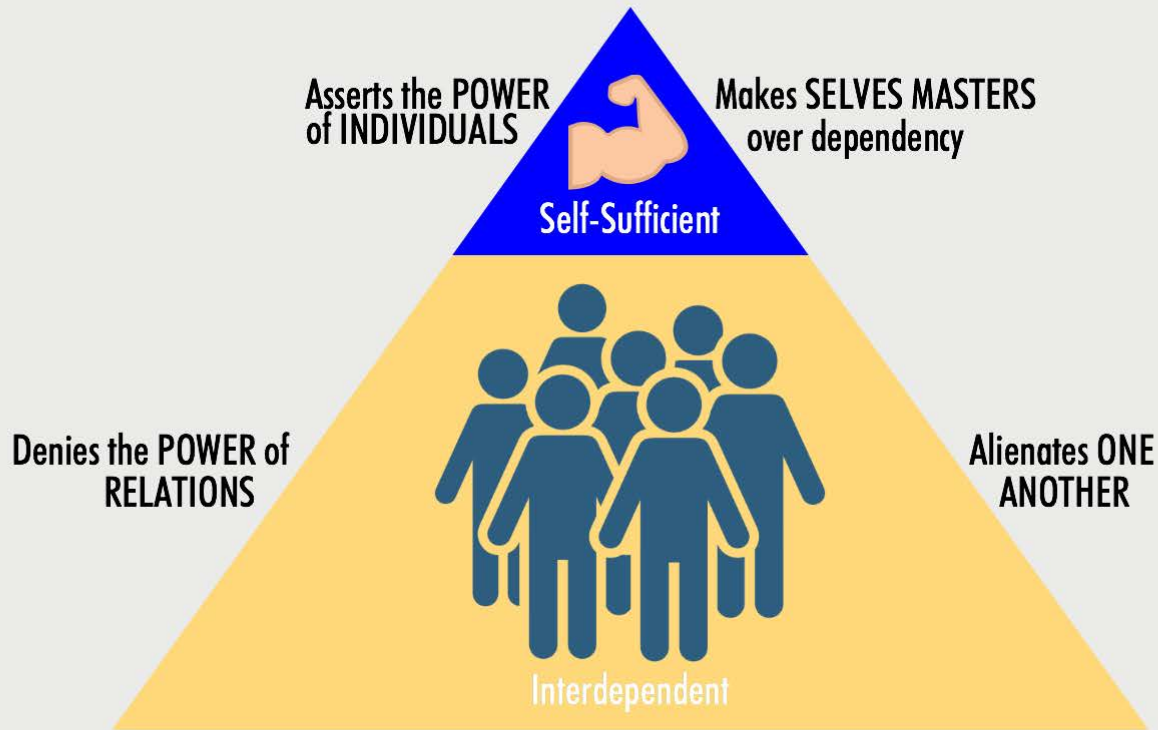
Crazy things we say:

- “America is a melting pot.”
- “*Those* people are savages.”
- “This is the land of opportunity for everyone.”
- “I’m not racist. I’m color blind.”
- “All lives matter.”

What’s wrong with this?

- It forces us to see some people as still “uncivilized” or weak in nature.
- It tempts us to assume that white people must be the most civilized.
- It promotes the expansion of an Empire that must homogenize culture in order to ensure order.
- It continues to justify violence, exclusion & oppression.
- It undermines the evolutionary principle that diversity is the key to resilience.

THE STORY OF SELF-SUFFICIENCY



The story goes like this:

- Fully mature individuals are independent & self-sufficient.
- In an ideal state, we shouldn't have to depend on others & shouldn't have to be burdened by the needs of others.
- We cannot thrive unless we are given "the space" to figure out our own authentic desires, dreams & goals in life.
- Dependent behavior is a sign of infancy, immaturity, disability or pathology.
- People who can't be independent need rehabilitation.

Crazy things we say:

- "You're so needy!"
- "You need to love yourself before you can love anyone else."
- "Pull yourself up by your bootstraps."
- "Oh grow up!"
- "Nice guys finish last."
- "God helps those who help themselves."
- "You can't trust anyone but yourself."

What's wrong with this?

- It ignores that humans are biologically wired for connection, not isolation.
- It ignores that the human body feels distress in prolonged isolation.
- It fails to understand that solitude, though nourishing in doses, can rob us of the vital resource that comes from interdependence.
- It sets us up to avoid sharing responsibility with others by limiting intimate connections to romantic partnerships exclusively.
- It drives us to hoard, compete for, and consume products & services as substitutes for relationships.

THE ANTIDOTE: STORIES OF CONNECTION

WE NEED STORIES THAT TIE US TO
NATURE, LEGACY, & ONE ANOTHER



WE NEED STORIES TO REMIND US
WE SHARE VALUES & STRUGGLES



We've been telling stories of connection for as long as we've had symbolic language.

THREE STORIES OF CONNECTION WE MUST RECOVER

MUTUALITY

We will not prevail in our efforts to dominate nature. We are entangled with nature.

DIVERSITY

We are not intended to be “civilized”. We enriched by the legacies of our ancestors.

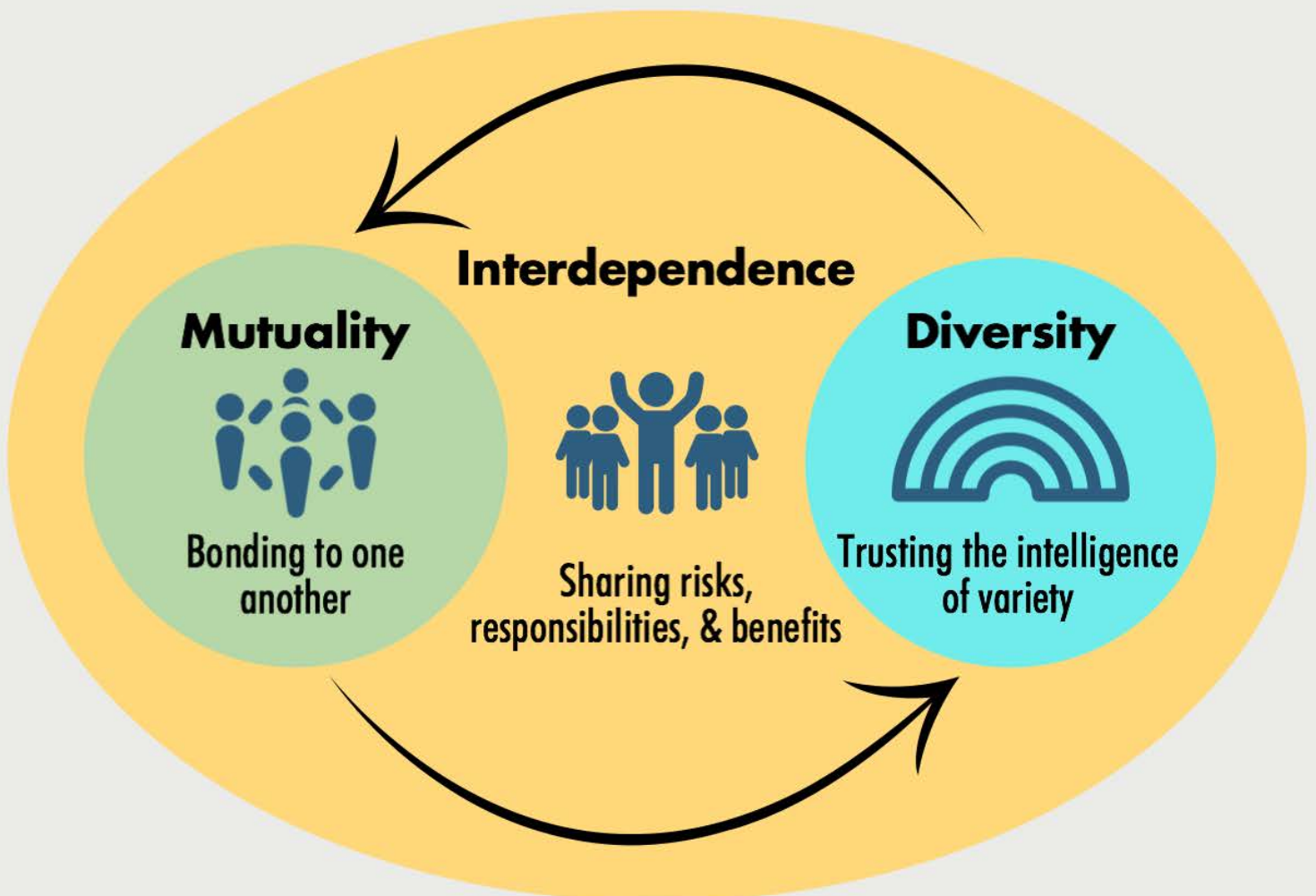
INTERDEPENDENCE

We are not self-sufficient. We depend on one another for our survival.

The **Story of Mutuality** is the oldest story we know. It is the story of our nature. It teaches us how life is born and thrives and generates more possibilities for life. It passes on to us the value of cooperation, not domination.

The **Story of Diversity** is a story of resilience. It teaches us how important variety and experimentation are to our adaptation with nature. It passes on to us the value of protecting other species and the many varieties of our own species.

The **Story of Interdependence** is the human story. It is about what makes us who we are. Our unique capacity to depend on one another and care for the vulnerable was perhaps the important factor in the selection of humans among all hominid species.



STORIES OF CONNECTION ELICIT RESONANCE

What is resonance?

The latest social neuroscience confirms that when we live our lives in close proximity to one another, our nervous systems are networked through the phenomenon of *resonance*. Like a musical instrument picking up the vibrations of the music played nearby, humans can detect the emotional tones of other animals.

How do we know when it's happening?

Resonance is something you can feel in your body. It is strongest when someone nearby is *engaging* with you. Being with someone who is expressing emotion, especially about a struggle—registers in our bodies. We vibrate with others who are having a challenge that reminds us of what's important to us. We are most engaged when we become aware of what we hold most precious. But any moment in which we feel moved, we KNOW it because we FEEL it.

Diverse resonance?

Just like a healthy ecosystem needs diversity of microbes, fungi, plants, insects and animals to survive, people need resonance from diverse sources. Imagine a guitar with six strings. Sound is going to vibrate from each string differently. We too need different resonance for all our humanizing notes to ring.

What's the benefit of sharing resonance with each other?

Resonance is not an individual skill but a collective capacity. When we share with one another how we are resonating, we increase the effect of resonance. And the more of us who do that together, the greater our collective capacity to bear our struggles. It is a powerful resource for a community, and one that's 100% renewable! It can bring us together, and keep us together.

What interferes with it?

The Stories of Separation reinforce isolation, suspicion, and separation. They desensitize us through continual overexposure to violence and sensational media. These signals interfere with our resonance sensors so that we do not notice how connected we are to one another. To notice and call attention to your experience of resonance is a powerful strategy for subverting the Stories of Separation.

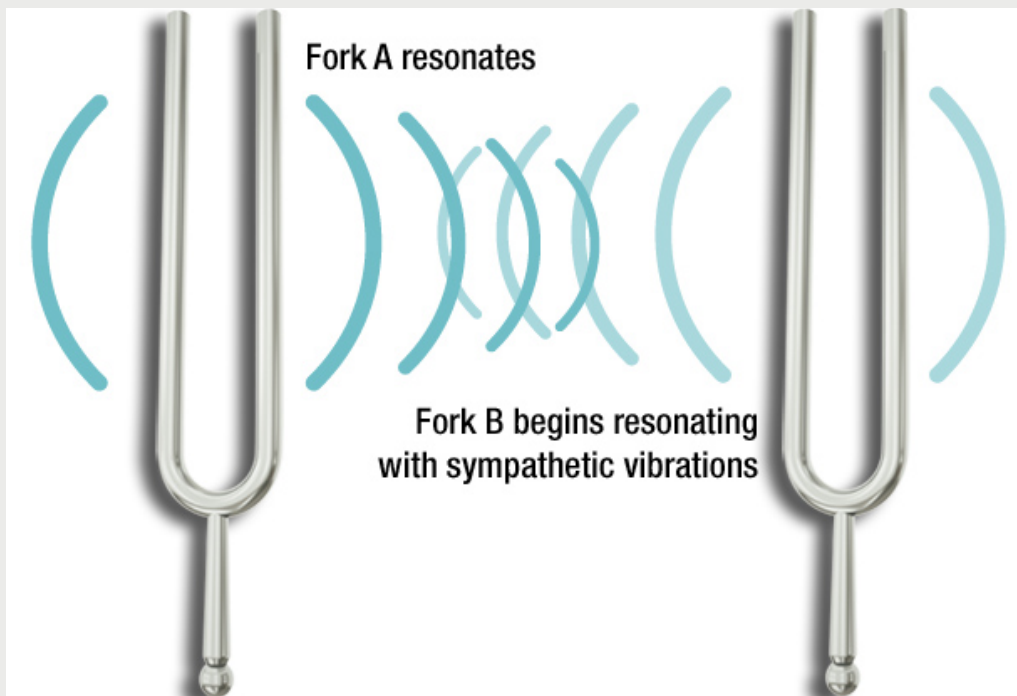
Resonance is a right!

Just like food and water, humans have a basic need for resonance. It is critical to a sense of belonging, acceptance, and empathy for others. It is even necessary for your health and immunity. Resonance should be considered a human right. It should never be restricted to only those who can pay. Resonance is free, a resource for collective liberation.

"A musical tone makes physical objects vibrate at its frequency, the phenomenon of sympathetic reverberation. A soprano breaks a wineglass with the right note as she makes unbending glass quiver along with her voice. Emotional tones in the brain establish a living harmony with the past in a similar way. The brain is not composed of string, and there are no oscillating fibers within the cranium. But in the nervous system, information echoes down the filaments that join harmonious neural networks. When an emotional chord is struck, it stirs to life past memories of the same feeling."

[Lewis, T.; Amini, F.; Lannon, R. (2007). *A General Theory of Love* (p. 128). Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.]

LEARNING TO SHARE RESONANCE



Why share resonance?

Sharing resonance is a gift to a storyteller. It lets them know what parts of their story are the most humanizing for both of you, supporting connection through vulnerability and empathy both ways.

Sharing resonance is an intentional somatic practice like meditation that requires shared responsibility and discipline. Group members should support one another to stay engaged while listening and keep to the guidelines.

What to do...

As you listen to someone telling Stories of Connection, tune in to the moments when you feel most engaged by what you hear.

Prompt: Share back with the storyteller the specific story **moments** when you felt “**right there with them.**”

Example: “I was right there with you when you asked your brother for help and he told you he didn’t want to hear about your problems.”

Hint: They may be the moments when you felt almost as if the events were happening to YOU. Those were the moments you were resonating.

What NOT to do...

Interpret

“From your story it sounds like you were actually depressed.”

Tell Your Own Story

That reminds me of when I was depressed.”

Ask Questions

“So how old was your mom when she had you?”

Share an Opinion

“I don’t think you should focus on the past.”

One-Up

“You think THAT’s bad! Listen to what happened to me!”

It’s cool...

If you catch yourself doing any of these, CONGRATULATIONS! You **caught** it! Which means you’re becoming more aware of habits that interfere with resonance. Yay!

Hint: If you’re not sure whether you’ve drifted away from resonance, you can keep to the storyteller’s own words when sharing the MOMENT.

If you find yourself drifting while listening, it might be because you are doing one of these. Once again, great noticing!

STORIES OF CONNECTION PULL FOR RESONANCE BECAUSE THEY ARE COHERENT

What makes the structure of Stories of Connection *coherent*?

The story structure is coherent because it responds to the most urgent questions we have about one another. Our brains evolved by organizing around scenarios for future life. That means the basic units of meaning we work with are tools we use to plan for outcomes that favor our survival. We think narratively. And we make sense of our experience by looking for the basic plot points of a story. The answers we most need to hear are the ones that could bond us to other humans in the struggle to go forward.

These are the questions we care most about answering when a story unfolds:

1. **What was the challenge?** What has the storyteller struggled with in the pursuit of defending their humanity? (E.g., shame, isolation, exclusion). What was the vulnerability, pain, uncertainty, injustice, suffering?
2. **What supports did you find?** Who supported them to rise to the challenge? What support did they receive? How did that support sustain them in defending their humanity?
3. **What choices did you make?** What agency did they find? What leadership did they take? What was the moment they/their family/community leaned on those supports to make their choice?
4. **What was the outcome?** What was the result? How did it end up? Where are things now because of it?
5. **What values do you now have?** What was reclaimed that you can now see is precious to **your** survival? What would **you** now defend in the face of new struggles?

A Focus on **Relational Support**

Even if it's hard to find, it's important to identify supportive relationships that helped you rise to your challenges. (Sometimes support comes to us in the form of memories of past relationships.) What happened as a result of leaning on that support? The outcome might be what you learned, in addition to what happened. As you construct your story and share it with others, you will notice themes of what has become vitally important in your life. What values does your story reveal? What more do you learn about your story through sharing it?

Examples of Supports

Family (Mothers, Fathers, Daughters, Sons, Grandmothers, Grandfathers, Aunts, Uncles, Nieces, Nephews, Cousins, Extended Family, Godparents, Alloparents, Ancestors)

Friends, Colleagues, Coworkers

Teachers, Mentors, Counselors

Spiritual or Religious Leaders

Communities, Clubs, Groups, Teams

Authors, Musicians

Movements

STORIES OF CONNECTION PULL FOR RESONANCE BECAUSE THEY ARE RELATIONAL

Public Narrative

Stories of Connection are modeled on Public Narrative, the leadership practice of translating values into action. To lead is to accept responsibility for enabling others to achieve shared purpose in the face of uncertainty.

Public narrative is a discursive process through which individuals, communities, and nations learn to make choices, construct identity, and inspire action. Responding to challenges with agency requires courage that is grounded in our capacity to access hope over fear; empathy over alienation; and self-worth over self-doubt. We can use public narrative to link our own calling to that of our community to a call to action. It is learning how to tell a story of self, a story of us, and a story of now.

Because it engages the "head" and the "heart" narrative can instruct and inspire - teaching us not only why we should act, but moving us to act. Based on a pedagogy of reflective practice, this course offers students the opportunity to work in groups to learn to tell their own public narrative.

The practice of telling **Stories of Connection** integrates the tools of public narrative with relational values and practices and can be used both to organize and to build community.

What makes a public narrative *relational*?

A story is relational when it strengthens our bonds. That means it increases our access to the experience of being a part of the ecology, embedded in an ancestral history, and tied inextricably to one another. Everyone has a relational story. Sharing our stories and resonating invites others into deeper relationship with us.

The relational elements of the story structure:

1. Values - Making Humanizing Values Explicit

Relational stories are about values that connect us to our humanity. Examples of those values are empathy, inclusion, equity, stewardship of life, care and protection of future generations. These stories make those values explicit. They begin with the challenges that dehumanized us, and/or when we dehumanized others.

2. Support - Independence Vs. Interdependence

We can choose the meaning we make of our stories. We are often conditioned to tell our story about how we did things on our own (independence, heroism). A relational narrative can tell that same story framed as how we depended on others' support (interdependence). It's not always obvious, but it is always there. What makes a narrative relational is the focus on the interdependence that comes through support.

3. Resonance - Receiving Resonance and Resonating with Diverse Stories

Giving/receiving resonance is fundamental to the process of telling Stories of Connection. Telling your story and hearing others' resonance is essential for ongoing development of your story. By hearing what resonates with your listeners, you develop an embodied understanding of the most humanizing parts of your story. As you tell it and receive resonance over and over, your story begins to gain more coherence. You may remember to include parts you had forgotten, or even recover feelings or insights you had long ago lost touch with.

FIND YOUR VALUE-STRUGGLE THEME WORKSHEET

Identifying Key Values

We can see what we value by looking at what we struggle with. We enter into struggle when something we hold precious comes under threat. The struggles we step into most emphatically in our lives are signs of what we most want to protect. Whatever we take risks to defend is what we value.

Use this worksheet to explore scenarios in your life when you encountered a threat to what you hold dear. You can identify a threat by considering how much you sacrificed (or put yourself in harm's way) to stand up to it.

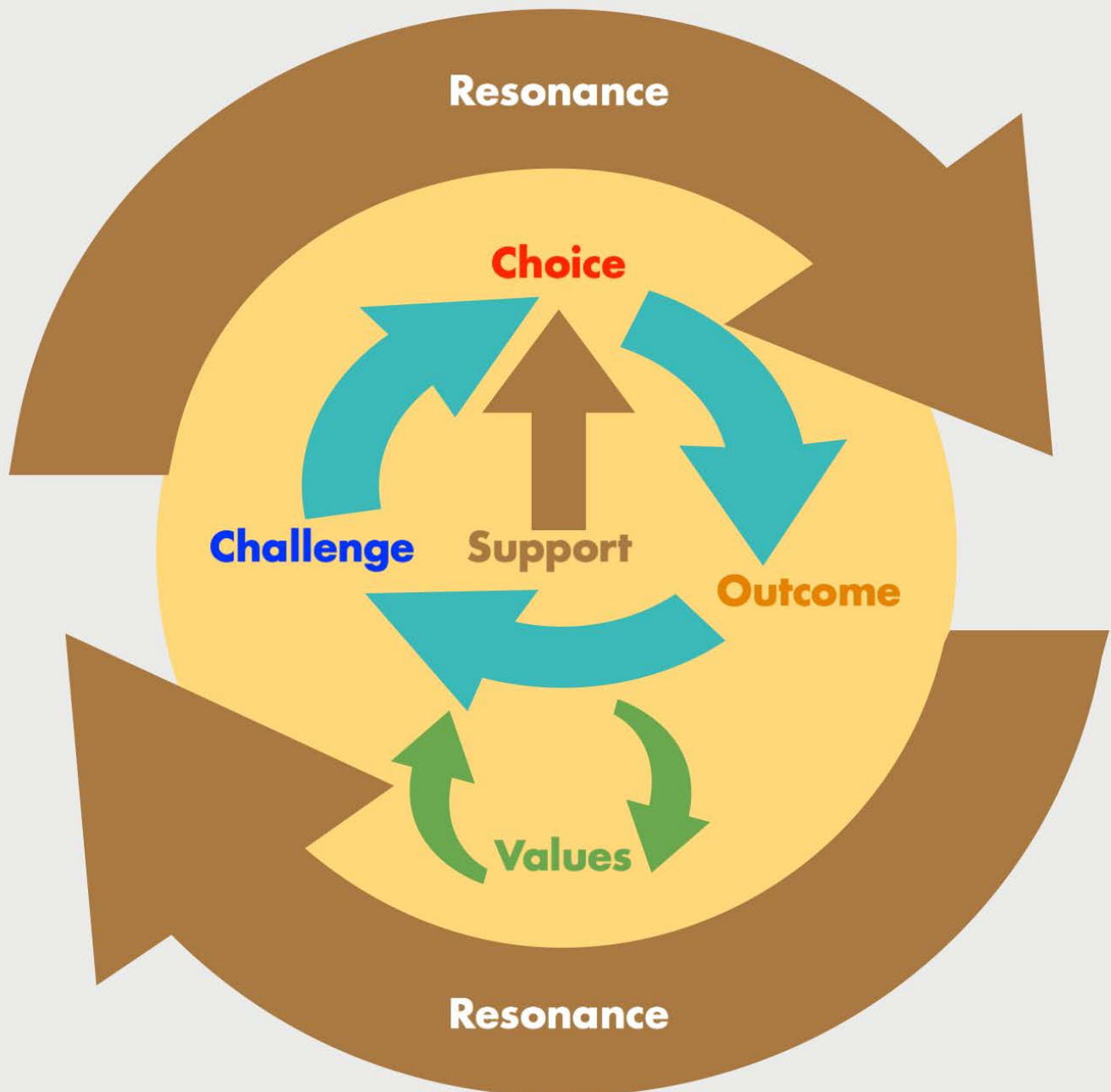
The Challenge

Describe a challenge you've faced when something vitally important to you was put at risk. This might be an event that left you feeling shame, isolation, and/or exclusion. It might be related to exiting a support system/supportive community or struggling to join a new place/community. The challenge may have threatened to take away the very conditions that your well-being depended on.

The Value

In the challenge you identified, what was vitally important that was threatened? **This is one of your values.**

TELLING STORIES OF CONNECTION



DISCOVER YOUR STORY WORKSHEET

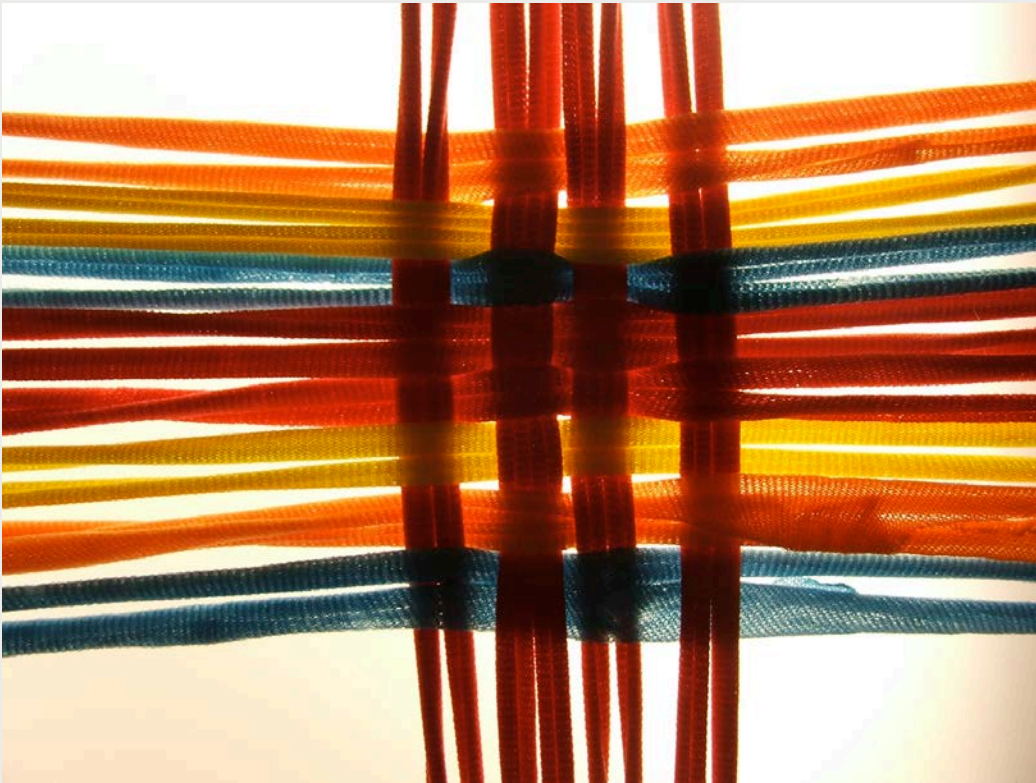
Developing the Elements of Your Story

Taking the time to develop our relational stories helps us make sense of the experiences we have in life and what values we have come to embrace. What are some significant struggles you have confronted in your life? Who was there to inspire and/or support you in the face of those struggles? How have those relationships contributed to your resilience? What do you value as a result of having these experiences?

Use this worksheet to find what parts of your life you can incorporate into your Story of Connection. Also...you can enrich and add to your story as you receive resonance from others!

VALUE	CHALLENGE	SUPPORT	CHOICE	OUTCOME

STORIES CAN WEAVE A CULTURE OF ENGAGEMENT



A Culture of Radical Engagement is a culture of connection. It is the inevitable result of our collective resonance to the stories that move us toward sustaining life and protecting the future.

This training program focuses on inspiring and nurturing leaders through a *strategic framework* that restores/reweaves a robust, diverse and resilient social fabric. We do this by taking the lead in cultivating resonance and reclaiming humanizing values through community, narrative, relationships, and action. We commit to radical interdependence with one another.

This framework is an integration of social capital research, social neuroscience, community organizing theory, relational theory, and somatic education.

Strengthening Bonds

- Cultivate Collective Resonance
- Build Trust and Reciprocity

Through a structured process of sharing resonance while listening to stories of connection, we strengthen the quality of the bonds in our community and build “bonding capital” with the explicit awareness of our shared values. This generates a supportive embrace of our individual grievances and sensitivities, transforming them into a humanizing resource for the collective.

Building Bridges

- Radically Include Diversity
- Ensure Full Inclusion & Representation

Steeped in the collective resonance we harnessed by strengthening our bonds and sharing values, we are supported to expand our capacity to include diversity and complexity. We enrich our humanity by “bridging” with difference, generating “accessibility” to humanizing bonds that is more inclusive, and redistributes risk more equitably.

Sharing Leadership

- Aim for Sustainable Benefit for All
- Promote Decentralized Agency and Collective Learning

Grounded in the dynamic process of strengthening bonds and building bridges, shared leadership in action is generated organically from these processes. It allows for highly effective collaboration and equitable distribution of agency, responsibility and benefit. This generates an interdependent “decentralized” infrastructure.

THREE LEVELS ON WHICH WE MUST RESONATE

RESTORING OUR SENSITIVITY

Without sensitivity, we cannot be moved. When we are desensitized for prolonged periods, we are at risk.

EXPANDING OUR ACCESSIBILITY

When we cannot be reached, we cannot change. When we become rigid, we cannot access nourishment or support.

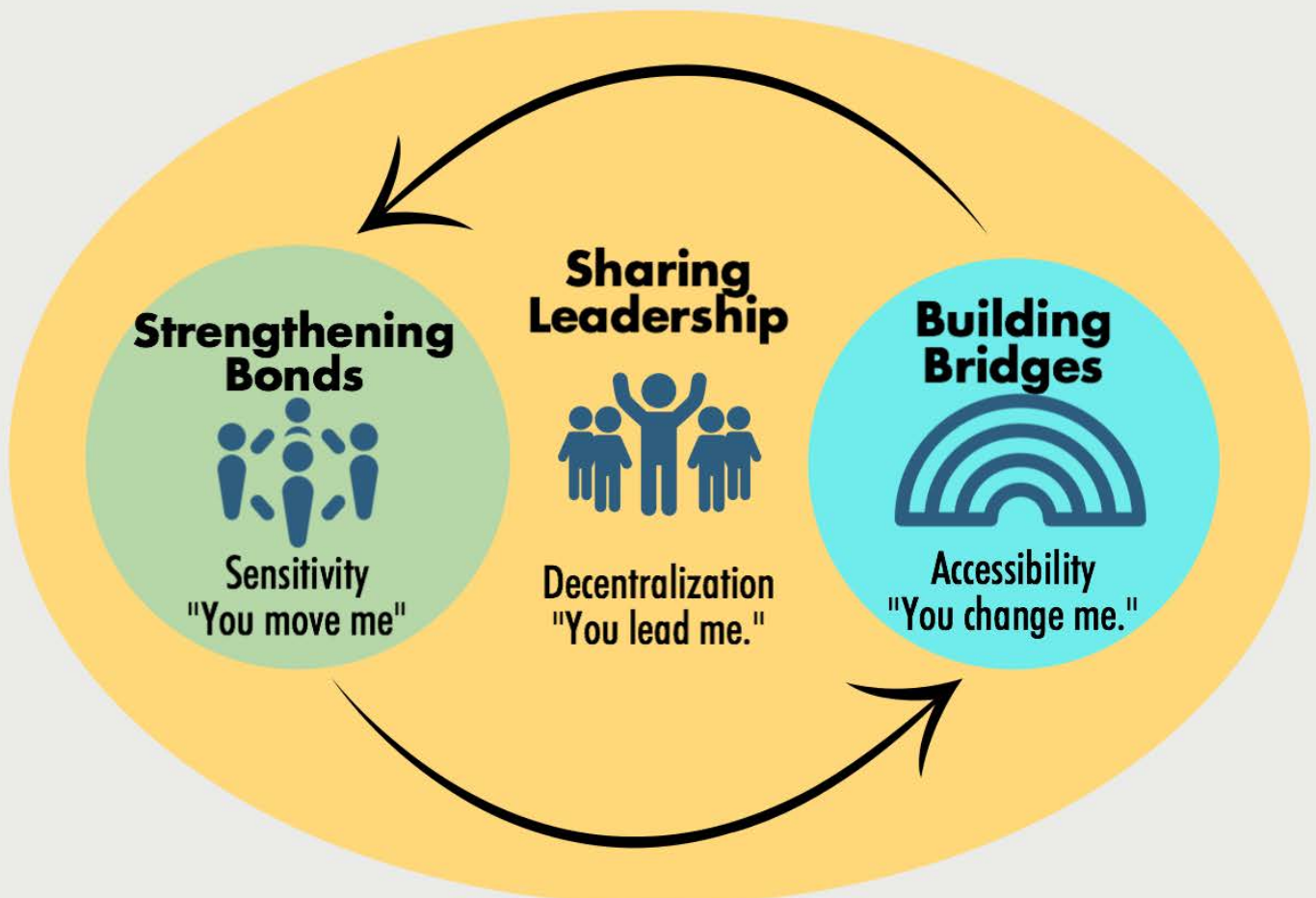
DECENTRALIZING OUR LEADERSHIP

When power is concentrated in only a few people, we lose the opportunity to contribute our unique assets. We were all born to lead.

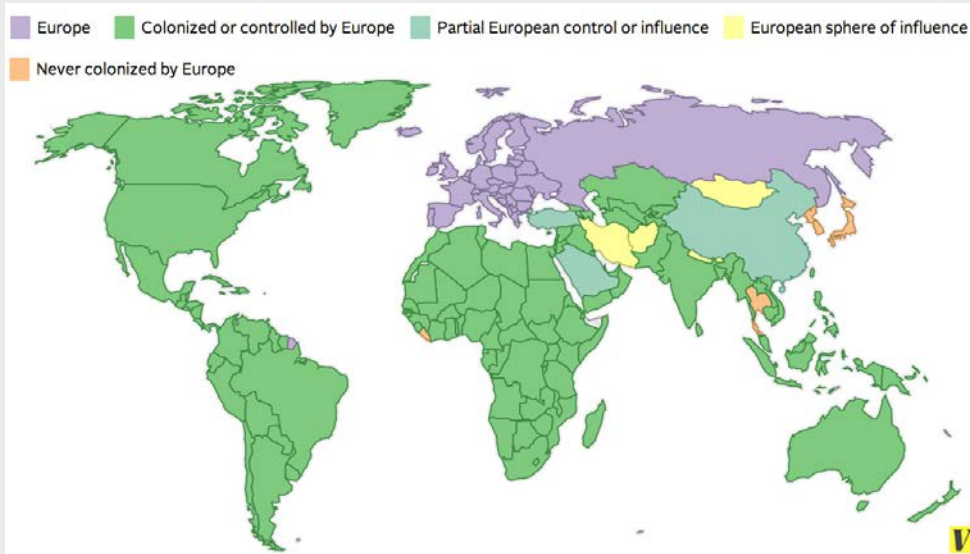
You move me. This is what we say when we become aware that a bond is forming. When we are tied to one another, where you go I go. We move together. So when we *feel moved* by one another, we are detecting the signal that we are **bonded**.

You change me. This is what we say when we notice that something new is possible as a result of our bonds. When you notice that someone has changed your mind or heart, that is a sign that they have become a bridge for you to cross into new territory.

You lead me. This is what we say when we recognize we are following one another. When our bonds are strong enough that you are helping me over hurdles around road blocks, I have evidence that you are leading me.



NOW DIVERSITY IS UNDER THREAT



The Stories of Separation threaten diversity, both in the ecology and human society. The impact on biodiversity is exemplified by monocultures and the war on insects with pesticides and GMOs.

This threat is evident in cultural and institutional systems of race, gender, class, and religion, enforcing conformity, often through violence. By perpetuating homogeneity, these stories go against a basic principle of life, threatening our health and the very fabric of our living Ecosphere and our human communities.

Our war on diversity has now contributed to the demise of the entire planet. In the distant past, the planet has undergone change so wrenching that the diversity of life plummeted. Five of these ancient events were catastrophic enough that they are called extinctions. Scientists now have found significant evidence that we are facing the threat of a sixth extinction caused by humans.

Without diversity, we lose our capacity to hold complexity, and with it lose our experience of vulnerability, emotionality, sensitivity, mobility, and ultimately our vitality. Reclaiming our story as members of the Ecosphere means understanding diversity as a key resource for life. A humanizing culture must be one that strives to reverse the harms of the homogenizing culture and instead builds our capacity to hold complexity, and to appreciate and integrate diversity as a humanizing resource.

A Basic Life Principle

Throughout 3.85 billion years, life on earth has celebrated diversity by redundantly embracing it with innovative strategies of mutualism. These strategies are what enable us to experience aliveness and connection as Vitality of the first cells, or as the Mobility of more complex organisms. In connection we can experience the Sensitivity that gave life a way to attract, appreciate, and integrate diversity more deeply. More recently (in Earth time) the experience of Emotionality and mutual Vulnerability has made possible the biggest embrace of the complexity of diversity.

Survival of the Most Adaptable

Contrary to the popular belief that “survival of the fittest” meant survival of the strongest and most competitive, the origin of this evolutionary principle actually referred to survival of the most adaptable life systems. This means that *the fittest are actually those most adept at integrating diversity* through mutualism, resourcing from the variety of interdependent relationships that coexist in cooperation.

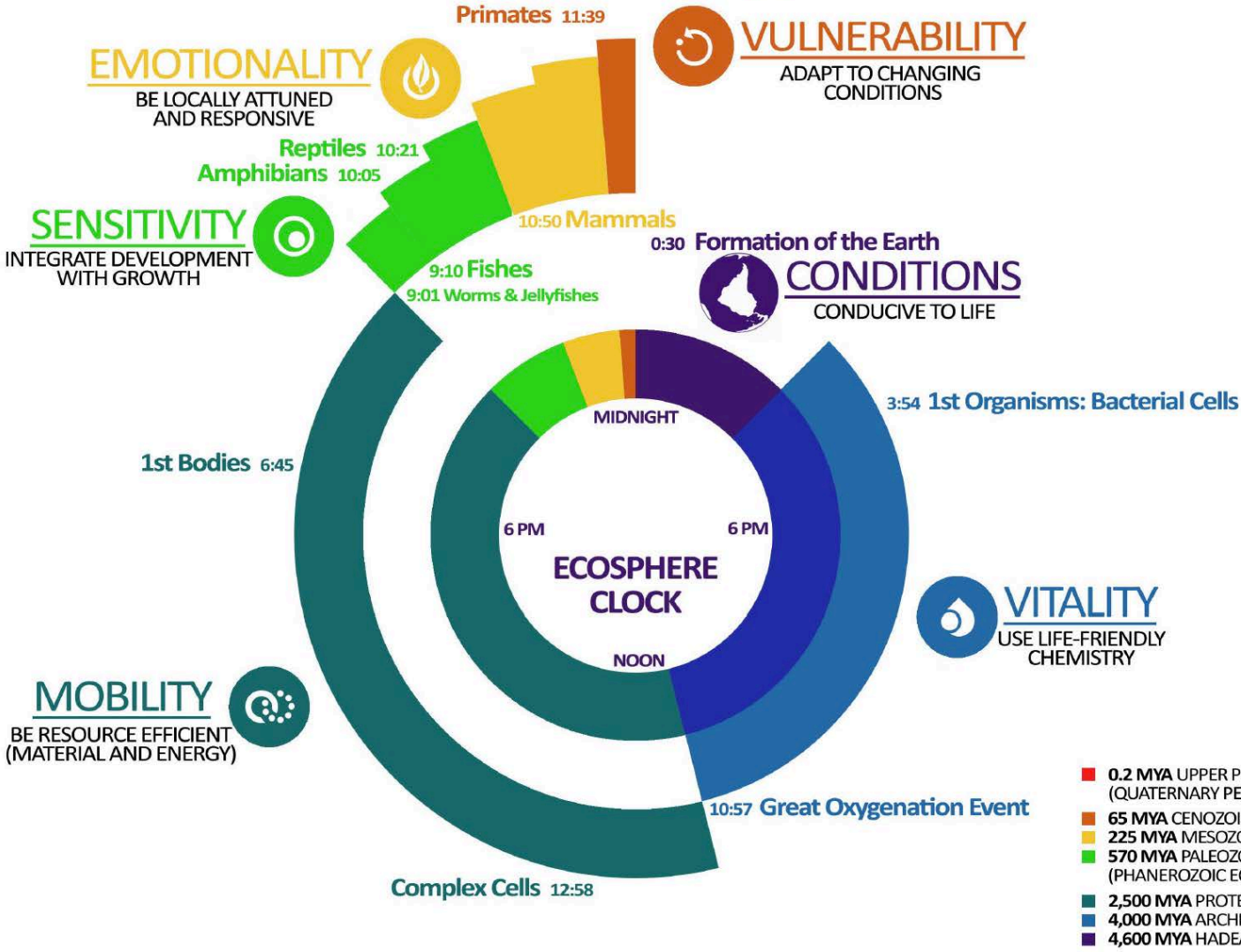
Reclaiming Diversity

In addition to the bonding provided by resonance, we need the enrichment that comes when we engage with what’s different. If we lose access to diverse stories, then we lose the conditions for wellbeing, resilience, and ultimately life. The flat, comfortable experience of homogeneity deprives us of the complexity that makes us adaptable.

Without diversity, we lose our capacity to hold complexity, and with it our experience of vulnerability, emotionality, sensitivity, mobility, and ultimately our vitality.

TELLING LIFE'S STORY

EVOLVE TO SURVIVE



THE OLD STORY OF **THE HUMAN VILLAGE**



Forgetting Our Roots

The **Stories of Separation** were seeded at historical turning points in humans' relationship to the ecology. These are moments that marked the exploitation of high-energy nonrenewable resources, whose extraction and consumption are extremely costly for our ecosphere, destroying information, both cultural and ecological.

The seeds of the **Separation from Nature & Body** emerged 10,000 years ago with the beginning of agriculture and the reliance on soil. We see it in the first mythic stories of monotheism, patriarchal gods, and the increasing association of the body with the profane.

The seeds of the **Separation from Marginal and Diverse Voices** emerged around 5,000 years ago. As soil eroded increasingly, humans began relying on wood from forests to order to make metal weapons for waging war and raising campaigns of Empire.

The seeds of the **Separation from One Another** emerged with industrialization just over 200 years ago. It has been enabled by the dependency on coal, oil, and gas. This has created the most stunning *illusion* of our "independence" from nature and one another. The ideal of independence is poison, and with every effort to get there we consume more of the earth's resources and undermine our futures.

*Evolutionary research has confirmed that what allowed humans to survive among all the other hominids that coexisted in Africa 200,000 years ago was our evolved capacity to **lean on each other, distribute risks, and share resources.***

We evolved this capacity for interdependence from the way we collaborated around child-rearing. The whole village worked together to raise their children.

*Scientists refer to this form of child-rearing as **alloparenting**. Through the interdependence of alloparenting, humans developed unusual capacities for reading one another's emotional states and intuiting intentions (empathy). We also developed the capacity for communicating (i.e. symbolic language) about how to guard our legacy and protect its future with each generation.*

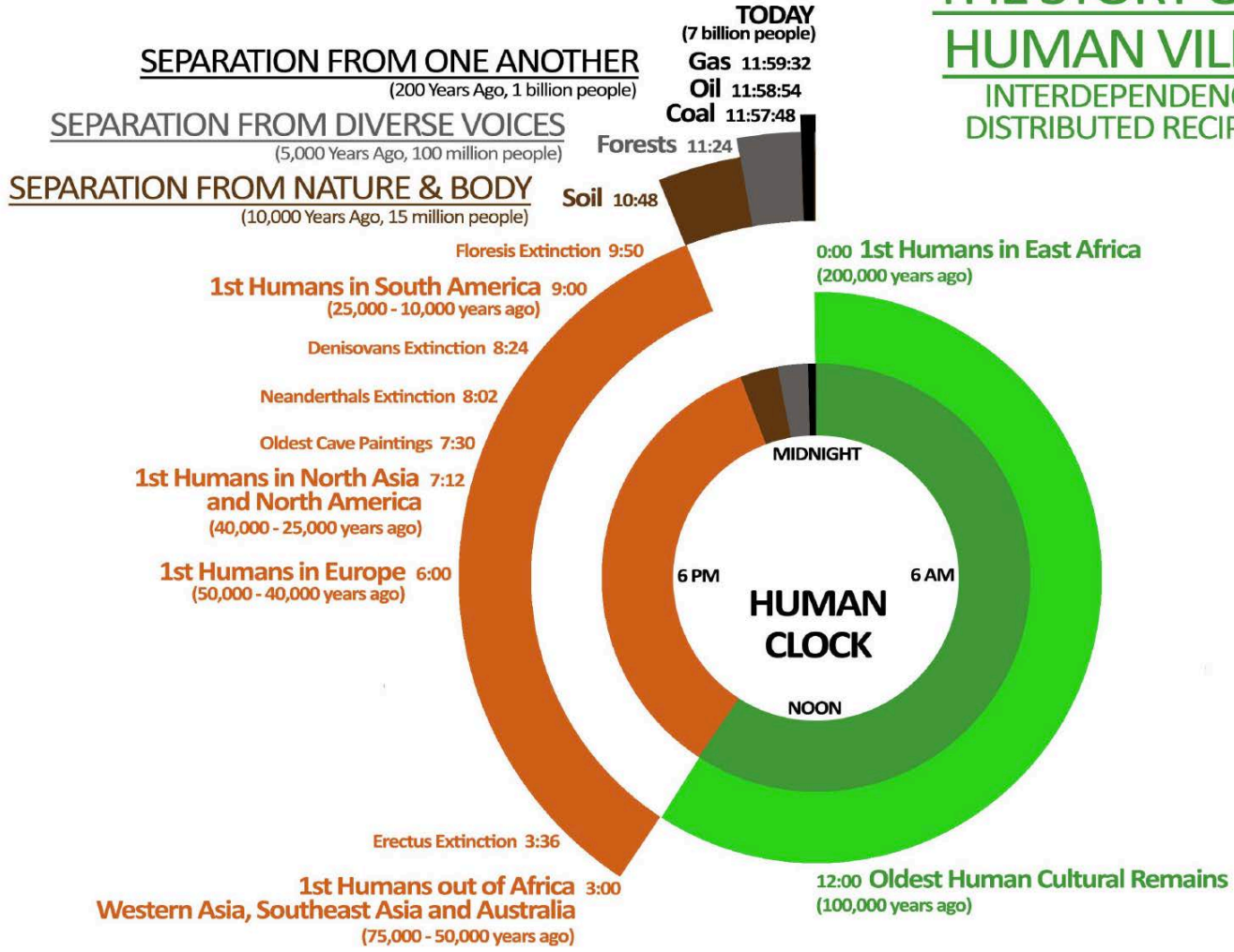
*These thriving alloparenting arrangements supported us to evolve our humanity. But in doing so, they also made us very **dependent** on our village. For this reason, we are deeply supported, nourished and healthy in relationship networks of distributed dependency. Conversely, we are under-supported and our resilience thwarted in isolation.*

According to resiliency studies (see Benard, 2004), starting at birth, we need access to at least five dependable relationships in order to develop, learn and thrive. Those five attachments and dependable supports from parents and alloparents are key throughout our life.

THE LAST 4 SECONDS OF THE ECOSPHERE CLOCK

THE STORY OF THE HUMAN VILLAGE:

INTERDEPENDENCE and DISTRIBUTED RECIPROCITY



KEEPING THE CULTURE

Story Circle Community of Practice Community Action Network



Conditions
7-12 People
Meet Regularly (4 hours per month)

Objective
Incubate the Culture

Circles are small-group structures that create the scaffolding to support and channel the culture we must keep.

While the *tasks* for each circle may vary, the necessary conditions and the core objective always remain the same.

The *size* of a circle must not shrink below a certain critical number that ensures enough momentum to keep it going. But it also cannot grow so large that people find it difficult to deepen their bonds.

The *frequency* of circle meetings is also critical. Meeting too infrequently will undermine the circle's capacity to meet its objective.

Tasks can include story development, support of practice, or a specific action (either one-time or an ongoing campaign).

Story Circle

- Practice Sharing Resonance
- Offer Story Coaching

This circle is focused on cultivating the conditions to find diverse resonance for people's stories. It also functions as a reflecting team that can support circle members to take stock of what engages others most deeply about their stories. It is very powerful to have a space in which to practice retelling stories—emphasizing moments that have pulled for the greatest resonance.

Community of Practice

- Stories of Connection Practice
- Building Bridges among Fields

In addition to the task of strengthening bonds that comes from the Stories of Connection practice, a Community of Practice organizes around a shared change strategy. This is a very helpful structure especially within institutions or between institutions. Outcomes include publication of practice standards, professional development and conferences/symposia.

Community Action Network

- Bonding & Bridging Practice
- Actions/Campaigns

The task of a Community Action Network is to support changemakers who have come together around a specific action or campaign. Bringing a *culture of radical engagement* to social action can inspire members to make an ongoing commitment to prioritizing mutual support and distributed leadership. It promotes a humane and empathic organizing culture.